

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND MENTAL RETARDATION

# Outlook

1ST QUARTER FY 09

IAGS  
2008 Winner  
Government  
Program Innovation:  
State/Regional  
Award

## PARENTING ASSISTANCE LINE



PARENTING IS TOUGH! SOMETIMES WE NEED A FEW TIPS.

### What is PAL?

The Parenting Assistance Line (PAL) is a collaborative service of The University of Alabama Child Development Resources and the Alabama Children's Trust Fund. When callers call the toll-free number, 1-866-962-3030, a parenting resource specialist will answer the phone, listen to you, then offer helpful information and support. Callers can also request free literature about their specific parenting concerns.

### Who is PAL for?

PAL is for anyone who wants information and support in becoming a more confident parent. Let's face it...when babies are born, they don't come with "instructions!" Parenting can be tough and sometimes with today's stresses and problems we all just need a little help. PAL can provide helpful assistance to moms, dads, grandparents, and relatives whose children are ages birth to twelve.

### Will they think I'm a bad parent?

No! All parents have times of frustration or stress over difficulties in raising a child. Calls are free and confidential. "Talking it out" can help us not "take it out" on our children.

### How do I get more information?

Call PAL at 1-866-962-3030 or check our website at [www.pal.ua.edu](http://www.pal.ua.edu)



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*Outlook is a quarterly newsletter of the Alabama  
Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation.  
It contains articles and information about department  
initiatives, community mental health services, individual  
success stories, and relevant national topics.*



Mission  
Statement

It is the mission of the Alabama mental health service delivery system to “Lift Life’s Possibilities” by ensuring that the mental illness, mental retardation and substance abuse recovery needs of the state’s citizens are addressed in a manner that is maximally effective and efficient, while promoting the individual’s quality of life, human worth, and dignity.



Letter from the  
Commissioner

Imagine a farmer who started with forty acres of land. Each year he produced better crops and over time, he acquired additional land. He prospered. Then there was a season of drought...a time of little rain that hindered progress. Finally the rains came and, although that year’s crop was not at its full potential, it was plentiful. State budget cycles have seasons of drought that follow the ebb and flow of the economy. No doubt you have read that the remaining part of FY09 and the projected FY10 revenues for the state are bleak.

When we face daunting challenges as we do now, it is easy to forget how far we have come. But when I consider the progress we have made in my more than 30 years of service with the state, I am reminded that there is cause for gratitude and hope. Like the farmer who faced a drought, our progress has been hindered by the economy. And, like the farmer...we have more resources than ever at work.

The Alabama Legislature will begin its session on February 3, 2009. At the top of their agenda will be the budget. Governor Riley has proclaimed a general hiring freeze and proration. Tax revenues are down and expectations for a quick recovery are low. In times like these the tendency is to look inward and withdraw but rather, it is a time to build on those partnerships that we have and to look for new collaborations that can help us through these difficult times.

We have cause to be thankful and to use this time to streamline services, eliminate waste and most importantly, think of new ways to serve people more efficiently. If we must cut back, do so with things that have not been as effective and preserve those “best practices” that we know will work. Already we are searching for innovative new partnerships within local communities and regions. There is talk that new funds and grant opportunities may be part of the upcoming federal stimulus package. Regardless, we must think of fresh ways to serve in this economic environment.

My challenge to all of you is this - think. Think about how you can do your job more efficiently. Think about gaps in services that can be filled through initiating partnerships with communities, faith-based organizations, and other agencies. Challenging times make a better football team, a better army, a better company and yes, a better state agency if we face them with courage, hope, and innovation. There will be better days ahead but for now, let’s work together in this mind and spirit to make FY09 the best that it can be.

*John M. Houston*





# GROUP DEVELOPS REINTEGRATION ACTION PLAN FOR RETURNING TROOPS

Since September 11, 2001, more than 13,000 Alabama National Guard service members have deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom. Unfortunately, this war, like all wars, has resulted in considerable mental health stress for some of our returning heroes and for their families. Reports of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and other mental health issues are increasing among returning troops, which in turn negatively affects their entire families.

To assist returning troops and their families, the Alabama Returning Veterans Committee developed a Reintegration Action Plan (RAP) that is designed to ease the transition of veterans and family members from active duty to civilian life. The plan had its origins when Commissioner Houston attended a National Association of State Mental

Health Program Directors (NASMHPD) meeting and participated in a session on returning veterans, which left him with a mandate to come back to Alabama and work on supports for them. The Department started talking to officials with Operation Grateful Heart and a plan was developed. The Alabama Returning Veterans Committee developed the plan modeled after a similar program in Ohio and then sought endorsements and suggestions from other groups. In the end, RAP is a collaborative effort of the Alabama Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation, Operation Grateful Heart, the

Alabama Psychological Association, Still Serving Veterans, the Veterans Administration, and other organizations providing services to veterans and their families.

November 20, 2008, marked the formal unveiling of the RAP, as Governor Riley signed his opening letter introducing the resource to returning troops. The finished RAP is a collection of strategies designed to facilitate successful transition, as well as a resource guide for obtaining professional assistance. Chapters on topics such as readjustment, re-experiencing events, triggers, relationships, and developing a buddy list

provide a wealth of information to returning soldiers. The group also developed a comprehensive list of additional local and national resources that is included.

Acquanetta Knight, Director of the Office of Policy and Planning at the Department and member of the Alabama Returning Veterans

Committee, says that she hopes the RAP, “will be utilized to reduce stigma and educate troops and families of how common these situations are.” Future plans for RAP include sharing it with mental health and substance abuse centers to augment treatment they are already providing, as well as developing it as a training guide. The booklet is available online at [www.alabamareturningveterans.org](http://www.alabamareturningveterans.org), but those wishing to obtain a hard copy may do so by contacting Tracey Daniell at the Tuscaloosa VA Medical Center at 205-554-2000, ext. 3684. 🐦



Cathy Crabtree, Associate Commissioner



David Jackson, Associate Commissioner



Kim Boswell, Human Resources Director

## Department Welcomes New Associate Commissioners and Human Resources Director

The Department’s Central Office in Montgomery has recently welcomed two new Associate Commissioners, as well as a new Human Resources Director. Cathy Crabtree joined the Department in January 2009 as the new Associate Commissioner for Intellectual Disabilities Services, following the retirement of Pat Martin. Crabtree has more than 30 years experience working with children, adolescents, and adults in the areas of child welfare, juvenile justice, human services, substance abuse, mental health, and intellectual disabilities. While Assistant Commissioner in Tennessee for eight years, she was responsible for services to children with intellectual disabilities along with all the other children the state was involved with. Most recently she had been the point person for the Camellia Project, a Governor’s Office initiative to create interoperable information systems for the state’s health and human services agencies. Crabtree has earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees in education and psychology.

David Jackson, former and still acting Chief of Staff at the Department’s Central Office, was appointed Associate Commissioner for the Administrative Services Division in October 2008. This division provides technical, financial, and management support to

the Department’s service divisions through a number of specialized sections. Before being appointed the Department’s first Chief of Staff in 2006, Jackson had worked in the Department’s Legal Bureau since 2000, and was promoted to Senior Attorney of that office in 2003. Prior to coming to the Department, David retired from the Air Force in 1999 at the rank of Colonel. Originally from Decatur, Indiana, Jackson holds a bachelor’s in government from Auburn Montgomery (formerly Auburn University Montgomery), as well as a Juris Doctor degree from the University of Alabama School of Law.

Kim Boswell came aboard as Human Resources Director in December 2008. She has nearly 25 years of human services related experience in the public, private, and non-profit sectors. Boswell’s areas of expertise include administrative and strategic planning, and she spent the last nine years as the Human

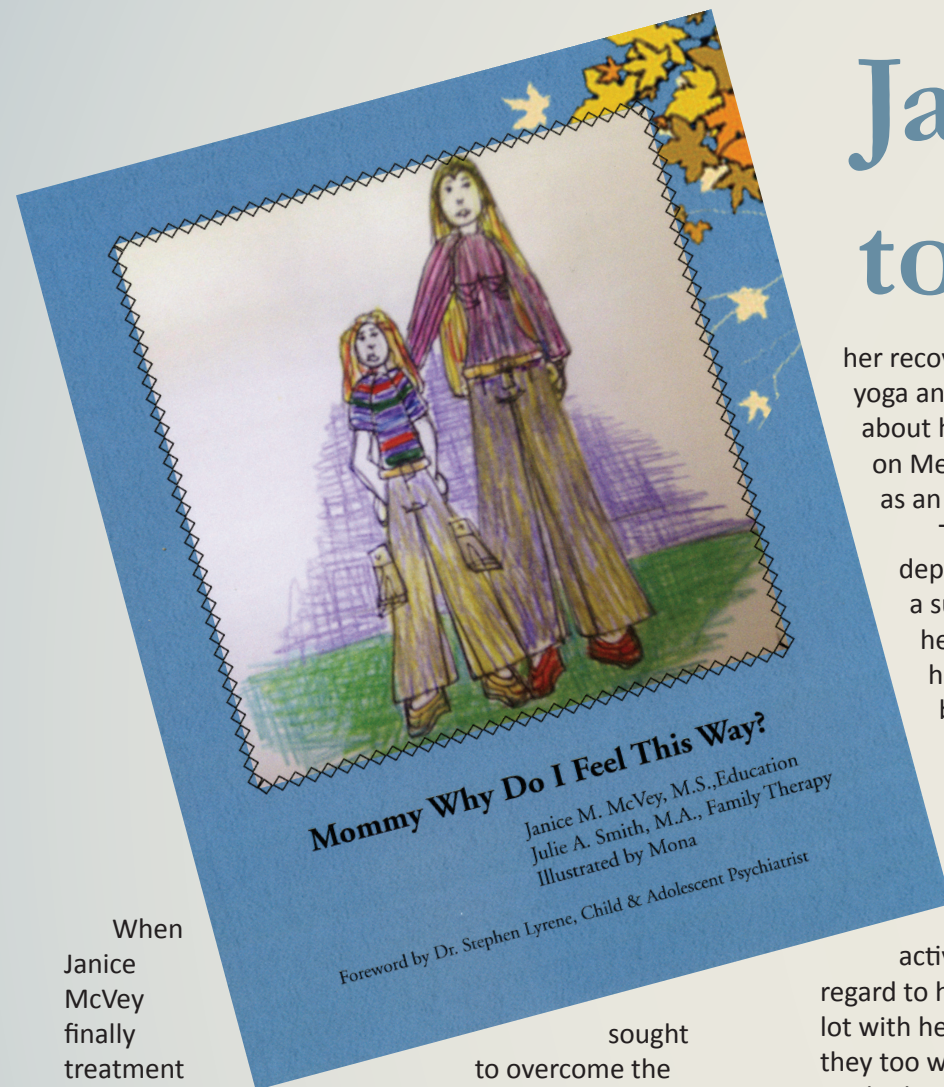
Resources Director for the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services. Boswell is a native of Birmingham, and has a bachelor’s in social work from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, as well as a master’s in social work, specializing in planning and administration, from Florida State University. 🐦

### Department Designated as a High Performing State Agency

The Department was recently approved as a High Performer by the state’s Finance Department. In order to receive this award, the Department demonstrated the ability to effectively manage performance measurement in the agency and consistently adhered to Finance Department policies.



# Janice McVey Dedicates Herself to Helping Others with a Mental Illness



When Janice McVey finally sought treatment for her obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and depression that she had experienced since childhood, the help and education she received helped her learn that it was an illness and that she was not a bad person. Today, she has found multiple outlets to spread this same message to others recovering from a mental illness.

Janice started having symptoms of OCD as a child in the 1950s, and later in life also developed depression. There were little to no mental health programs in Clay County during those days, so she hid her obsessions and compulsions for as long as she could. The OCD symptoms would wax and wane, and she was able to cope with them for much of her life. She was always active, and enjoyed playing and physical activity until the OCD worsened and she was anxious almost every waking hour. However, she went on to finish college and worked in the education field.

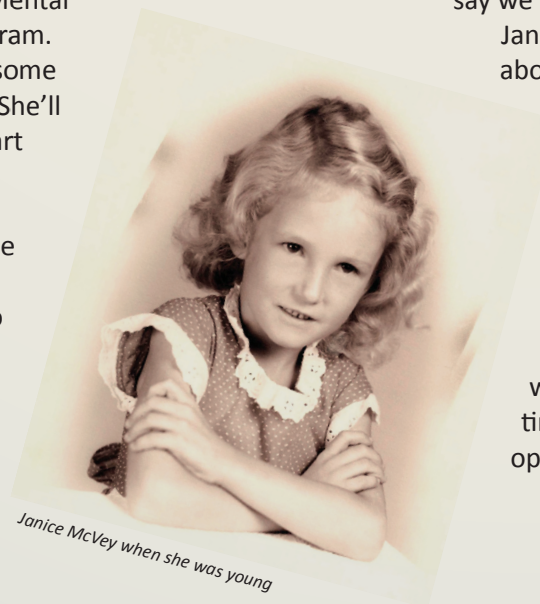
Janice decided to seek treatment once she had children and her obsessions with choking became disruptive. She went through a period where she would not eat and was losing weight. She also had obsessive thoughts about drinking bleach and other harmful actions. That is when she knew she needed to seek treatment. She visited her local mental health center and began a path toward treatment. These days, Janice says

her recovery is, “going well. I have a great doctor, take yoga and exercise regularly.” She also learned more about her illness through her local National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) office and counts education as an integral part of recovery.

Throughout her struggle with OCD and depression, Janice has been very lucky to have a supportive family. She says that even though her parents did not know what was wrong with her, they were as good as any parents could be under the circumstances. When she grew older and was married, she had what she calls a “very bad time” in her illness when she would call her husband all during the day while he was at work with one obsession after another. But he was always patient and supportive, and has even become very active in helping with her volunteer work. With regard to her children, Janice knows they went through a lot with her symptoms when they were young, but that they too were supportive. Janice says, “I think that has made them more understanding of others today.”

Because of her experiences, the help she received, and the lessons she learned, Janice felt it was important to help others who face some of the same challenges she had. Her way of giving back is by volunteering at the local NAMI office in Foley. Throughout the week she answers calls and assists in referring people to the help they need. But her volunteer work doesn’t stop there, in addition to hosting a NAMI luncheon once a month, she has also taught classes for Baldwin County Mental Health Center’s day treatment program. In addition, she works closely with some group home residents as a mentor. She’ll take people shopping or help with art supplies or food for their pets.

One of the residents she met at the group home is Mona, who Janice calls, “probably the most delightful person I have ever known.” The two ladies began a great friendship through Janice’s mentoring, and that friendship expanded when Mona, who is a talented artist, recently illustrated a book that Janice and her daughter



Janice McVey when she was young

co-wrote called “Mommy – Why Do I Feel This Way?” The idea came from Janice’s daughter, Julie, and Janice quickly agreed because she had always been interested in children with mental illnesses since hers began as a child. Janice wrote down her childhood experiences and Julie, who has served as a therapist in the mental health field for more than 13 years, put them in book form. They felt it was important for the book to be on a child’s level so a child or their parents could read it. Their hope is that the book will be a starting point on a road to recovery for children who have OCD and a resource for their parents.

The three ladies have sold several of the books locally to psychiatrist offices and mental health centers. They do not really have the money to invest in marketing it on a grand scale, but will instead sell it at a book signing that will be held in Janice’s hometown of Ashland, as well as an art show where Mona will be showing her work. Overall they are very proud of the book, as it truly became a family affair with Janice and her daughter as authors and her husband searching for a publisher.

This book however, is not Janice’s first foray into writing. She also wrote her life story and shared it in her book *Hope Over Struggle*. Janice believes writing is an outlet that helps in her recovery, as it does for many with a mental illness. She wrote *Hope Over Struggle* because she wanted, “to show others there is hope.” She says, “It hurt me as I wrote {the book}, but it became easier to share the more I shared. I wanted to show that we are good people even though we have an illness. I wanted to say we do not have to be ashamed.”

Janice wishes more people would understand facts about mental illnesses. She says, “These are no fault brain disorders. We did not choose to have them, just as no one chooses to have an illness.” She is sad to see that there is still a stigma surrounding mental illness, but says, “Some of the strongest people I know have a mental illness. I think it is the most unfair illness of all, but in spite of it, I have seen many people thrive.” It is because of people like Janice, who share their experiences and volunteer their time, that others with a mental illness have the opportunity to thrive. 🐦



Janice McVey, Author



Julie Smith, Co-Author



Mona, Illustrator



# PAL Named Award Winner

## Parenting Assistance Line

Alabama's First Lady Patsy Riley recently accepted the Government Program Innovation: State/Regional Award for the Parenting Assistance Line (PAL). As the spokesperson for PAL, and the face of its numerous billboards and TV commercials, she accepted the award on its behalf at the third annual awards ceremony held during the Innovative Alabama Governments Summit. The award is given to an Alabama state or regional government that implemented an innovative program to increase efficiency and/or responsiveness in government service delivery. She says she was, "very humbled and honored" to see that others recognized what a truly outstanding service PAL provides to Alabama families. After all, she had seen the merit in such a program when the idea for PAL was first thought of in 2004.

While visiting a local children's center and talking about how it helped children being abused, Mrs. Riley asked what was being done to prevent child abuse. When she got the answer that there were few programs for that, God spoke to her heart and she soon started thinking about billboards throughout the state advertising a toll free number for parents to call for help. After she ran the idea past some contacts PAL evolved into what it is today, which is a collaborative service of the University of Alabama Child Development Resources in partnership with Wal-Mart, the Alabama Children's Trust Fund (the Department of Child Abuse and Neglect



Mrs. Riley prepares to film television commercials promoting PAL.

Prevention), the Alabama Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation and the State Department of Human Resources.

PAL was launched in March 2007, with a broad based media campaign. Hundreds of people called the service through which they ask questions about how to be a better parent and could voice their concerns. They are provided support and information about their child's development at specific ages, strategies for coping with children's behavior, and methods of reducing and coping with anger and frustration, even during challenging times. Although calls are confidential, callers can also request free literature about their specific parenting concerns as well as local resources.

Since the lines have been open, PAL has received more than 4,500 calls ranging from typical parenting issues like toilet training to more serious situations like abuse or alcohol and drug problems. Calls have been received from virtually every county as well as 18 other states. Parents can call 1-866-962-3030 Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. to speak to a trained specialist, or they can visit the Web site at [www.pal.ua.edu](http://www.pal.ua.edu) for parenting tips on a variety of topics, including single parenting, postpartum depression, fatherhood, or even after-school care. ➔



Mrs. Riley accepts the Government Program Innovation: State/Regional Award on behalf of PAL at the Innovative Alabama Governments Summit.

## Consumer Group Hosts "Comedy for a Cause"

Contact: Wings Across Alabama recently hosted a unique event at Alabama State University to promote an anti-stigma message about people with a mental illness. More than 130 students attended "Comedy for a Cause," and heard consumers share their stories about recovering from a mental illness. They were also treated to a comedy show featuring Ced Delaney of Birmingham and Pat Brown of the BET show "Somebodies."

"Comedy for a Cause" was the kickoff to the Campaign for Mental Health Recovery, which is the result of an anti-stigma grant Wings received from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) ADS Center. Ronald Hunt, Executive Director of Wings, said that the purpose of the event was, "To put a face on people with a mental health diagnosis for people ages 18-25. We hope to reduce their fear in getting treatment if they should need it, or to encourage them to support friends who have been diagnosed with a mental health disorder."

Five "twenty-something" consumers shared their stories



Tamika shares how her friends played a role in her recovery.

stressing the important role that friendship and acceptance play in their recovery. Tamika and Emma told stories about how friendship helped them restore a sense of normalcy in their lives, and Jeri shared her experience as an Army soldier and the brain injury that ended that career. Kaleb shared his battle with substance addiction and stressed the importance of developing friendships that were

healthy and supportive in his choice not to "use." In addition, Evan shared what it was like growing up with a mother who was diagnosed with Bi-polar Disorder.

A similar event, the "Stand Up for Mental Health Comedy Tour," will be held at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, the University of Alabama, and Troy University on January 27, 28, and 29, respectively. These



Students at Alabama State University gather to listen to comedians and consumers during Contact: Wings Across Alabama's Comedy for a Cause.

will feature the Stand Up for Mental Health comedy team of Kim and Alex, who do comedy routines about life as consumers of mental health services. For more information about these events, call Contact: Wings Across Alabama at 334-395-7616. ➔

## Mental Health Disorders Common in Young Adults but Few Seek Treatment

Reuters Health recently reported that a recent survey found that almost half of college-aged Americans have suffered from some type of mental health problem in the past year, but few seek treatment. Researchers based their findings on a government health survey conducted in 2001-2002 of more than 5,000 people ages 19-25. Results showed that mental health disorders were common among both college students and those not in college. However, neither group was likely to have had the problem addressed; overall, one-quarter had sought treatment for their mental health disorder in the previous year.

Alcohol abuse was slightly more common among college students, while their non-student peers were

at greater risk of drug abuse. The prevalence of anxiety disorders and mood disorders, which include depression and bipolar disorder, was similar in each group. Nearly 12 percent of non-students had a mood disorder, as did almost 11 percent of students. The rate of anxiety disorders was also around 12 percent in each group.

Treatment rates were low in both groups, but college students were only about half as likely to have sought help for their alcohol or drug problem. "These findings underscore the importance of treatment and prevention interventions among college-aged individuals," the researchers reported in the Archives of General Psychiatry. ➔



## HARLEY RIDERS CONTINUE TRADITION OF MAKING CHRISTMAS SPECIAL FOR ADOLESCENTS AT BRYCE

With the image of Harley Davidson motorcycle riders the company has created over the years, some may find it hard to believe that these “tough bikers” have a soft side. But the Heart of Dixie Harley Owners Groups showed their softer side for the fifth year in a row as they continued to make Christmas a little brighter for children at Bryce Adolescent Facility in Tuscaloosa. The group again chose to make the “Bryce Ride” one of their primary charity rides of the year.

On December 13, 2008, a large caravan of Harley-Davidson motorcyclists left the Heart of Dixie Harley Dealership in Pelham and drove to Bryce to visit with the children and bring them gifts they collected and wrapped. Their arrival onto the campus was watched by the children, and some that were especially excited about the motorcycles got to go out and see them. After they arrived, the riders did not just deliver the presents and leave. They were able to visit with the kids and have snacks. The group sang Christmas songs, chatted, and joked. Some of the kids wanted to show off their talents so they put on a mock talent show where some sang, cheered, and more. It was hard to tell who had more fun, the kids or the Harley riders.

Many of us cannot imagine being an adolescent or teenager and spending the holidays in a psychiatric hospital, but such is the case for a number of children residing at the facility.

That is one of the reasons the Harley Owners Group feels this ride is so important. As member Cassie Hall stated, “We look forward to doing this every year because we do not want any child to feel unwanted during the holidays. Every child should get the special feeling from that moment of getting gifts on Christmas morning. We want them to know that there are people



Riders with the Heart of Dixie Harley Owners Group drive down the entrance to Bryce Hospital on their way to deliver presents to children at Bryce Adolescent Facility.

who care about them and want their Christmas Day to be important.”

That is one reason the Harley riders requested that the kids not open the gifts until Christmas Day. When they did, they found items such as sweat suits, cards, games, activity books, journals, stickers, bedroom slippers, hats, and gift certificates. The group even made up extra boxes of gifts in case any other children

were placed at the facility before Christmas.

In order to make this a warm Christmas for some of the most seriously ill youth in Alabama, the ride is a partnership between The Alabama Department of Mental Health & Mental Retardation’s Mental Illness Division, JBS Mental Health in Birmingham, and the Heart of Dixie Harley Owners Group. The Bryce Adolescent Facility is a state-of-the-art youth residential unit with classrooms and certified teachers that enable students to continue their education while in treatment. The facility is a 20-bed unit, with the capacity to serve ten males and ten females ranging from ages 13 to 18. Currently, there are approximately 20 residents.

Kim Hammack, Coordinator of Child and Adolescent Services at the Department, and coordinator of the event said, “Words will never be able to express how important this annual tradition has become to the adolescents at Bryce. We all get busy in the season by preparing for our own kids and our special Christmas Day. It is

heartbreaking to think there are kids with mental illness who can not be at home during the holidays. This selfless giving lets them know they are special, wanted, and cared for. Before this annual Bryce Ride started, Christmas was just another day for them. This event assures that their Christmas will be special too.”



Riders pose with their motorcycles at Bryce Hospital during the fifth annual “Bryce Ride.”

## Linda Pierce Receives “Heroes in the Fight” Award

Linda Pierce’s list of awards and accomplishments as a mental health professional received yet another boost as she was recently honored with a “Heroes in the Fight” award. This award was established by Eli Lilly and Company to celebrate dignity, courage, hope, and recovery in the ongoing treatment of people with serious and persistent mental illness. “Heroes in the Fight” is coordinated through Mental Health America Montgomery along with input from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Alabama, the Alabama Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation, and several mental health centers and advocacy groups. Lisa Coleman, Clinical Director of the Mental Health Center of North Central Alabama where Linda works, said, “This is a difficult award to receive and we are extremely proud of Linda and her accomplishments.”

Since she began her career in the mental health field twenty years ago, Linda has received numerous awards including the NAMI Alabama Outstanding Case Manager award, Clinician of the Year award from the Alabama Council of Community Mental Health Boards, and the Respect Award. Her love of what she does was evident as she accepted the award and said, “I share this award with all those that have been diagnosed with

a serious mental illness, you are truly heroes. You get up every morning and face a world that can be cruel, unkind, and judgmental. I thank you, who have allowed me the honor of being in your homes..., and most of all for allowing me to be a part of your lives. You are my heroes and will always have a part of my heart.”

Linda’s journey into a career in mental health began when she found herself a single mother of three in 1988 with no work history, no degree, and no real skills. She went to work at a day care center driving a small school bus and had been on the job for about a week when she was told she would soon start transporting adults with a mental illness to and from day treatment. She previously had no real contact with anyone with a mental illness, and admits she did not know exactly what to expect.

Within a month she had found a love for working with them and begged for a job with a local mental health center. However, she found there were no positions available for someone without a degree. That’s when she decided to return to school to get a degree in psychology.

Linda did just that, graduating with a BS in psychology from Athens State University in 1993. She soon became a Case Manager with the Mental Health Center of North Central Alabama, where she has been for more than 18 years. Over the years she has taken on other duties such as serving as the State Hospital Liaison for the past ten years, and covering an After Hours Crisis Call line with friend and mentor, Carolyn Haraway. Linda talks about Carolyn with great respect and states, “She is the one who talked me out of business college and into

the field of psychology, she helped me find a job, gave me wings to fly, and I am proud to have her as a mentor and friend.”

No doubt Linda has also served as a mentor to many of her professional peers and consumers over the years. She delights in successes she has played a role in, including watching a consumer who spent 30 years in Bryce Hospital make incredible strides and go on to live independently outside an institution. Another was watching a consumer whom she had spent more than

15 years working with accept an award for Outstanding Consumer at their NAMI Gala. Linda says about her friend’s award, “This is what mental health services are about. This is why we in the field continue the fight.”

That “fight” is to continue to show the general public that people with mental illnesses have the same desires and hopes they do. As Linda states, “They have the same rights to family, home, love, and a chance to have the great American dream.” She goes on to say, “They deserve the right to the best life they can have, and I have had the honor to play a small part in aiding some to achieve their goals.” Indeed, Linda’s most recent award is certainly a testament to the difference she has made in so many people’s lives.



Linda poses with the newest addition to her wall of honors, the 2008 “Heroes in the Fight” Award.





Alabama Department of Mental Health & Mental Retardation  
RSA Union Building  
100 North Union Street  
P.O. Box 301410  
Montgomery, AL 36130-1410

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